

Reflections on Policy and Practice in Multicultural Education in Cyprus

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Abstract: Contemporary Cyprus society is no longer homogeneous. Increasingly, Cypriots have contact with people of different cultures. The same happens in schools in Cyprus. In this article, through an ethnographic study, we investigate what happens today in Cyprus regarding the education of international and repatriated students. Analyzing the case study of a primary school class and two vignettes we try to clarify the status quo in the first part of the article. In the second part we attempt to answer the question: 'Is our educational system a melting pot of every alien civilization and a kettle of cultural assimilation that perpetuates biases, clichés, racist behaviors and cultivates the idea that the different has no place among us?' Using naturalistic models of research, we developed the case of a girl from Iran who studies in a primary school in Cyprus. Through the analysis of two other vignettes, we attempt to answer the above question and at the same time to present a critical view of the situation of multicultural education in Cyprus presenting its prospects for the future. Our article, it is hoped, will give stimulus for possible changes and reforms within the Cyprus educational system. In such a way, the

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Cypriot system will be able to initiate progressive international developments in the area of multicultural education.

Introduction

Over the last two decades various social theorists have been engaged in discussions regarding the phenomenon of globalization and how it impacts different aspects of the society and education in particular (e.g., Burbules & Torres, 2000; Mason, 1998). Globalization is defined as 'the process by which the peoples and nations of the world are increasingly drawn together into a single entity (Porter, 1999, p. 53). This new condition seems to have an impact on the society of Cyprus. Until recently the society of Cyprus was relatively homogeneous. However, over the last few years there has been a continuous amplification of its multicultural character. A short walk in the old "within-the-walls" town of Nicosia (the capital of Cyprus) will convince anybody about the reality of this recent amplification. During the last decade a significant number of international workers and housekeepers from Asia, entertainment artists from the former eastern bloc, as well as repatriates from the former Soviet Union have been added to existing social groups. ('Repatriate' is used throughout this article to refer to the resettling of people from the Greek diaspora back into Greek culture, in this instance settling in Cyprus.) So there is an increasing number of Cypriots who come in contact with people having different cultures. According to a recent report during the year 2003 there were 43.426 (5.8% of the population) legal workers in Cyprus and it was estimated that another 40.000 workers worked illegally (Department of Social Insurance and Police Records, 2004). Through this contact, there is an obvious need for symbiotic and synergetic relationships among these divergent groups and individuals.

The growing multicultural character of Cypriot society has raised previously unencountered problems that the government has had difficulties in dealing with. Through reading the newspapers and following the different TV documentaries, we very often confront problems arising from intercultural misunderstanding and conflict. Also, we see in the mass media various people who are desperately asking for understanding, respect for and tolerance of their ethnic or cultural difference. For example, in Cypriot newspapers, a series of articles has been published that create emotions of fear and hate against the 'bad foreigners' who came to Cyprus to get our jobs, and they are also blamed for the crime increase of late (Tharros, 1998; Pissas, 1998; Romanos, 1998). There has been a reaction to the above articles emanating from the 'Foreigners Support Movement'. Their accusations, from time to time, talk about a

parastate (or unofficial policy) with exploitation of foreigners, official violence, employers that ill treat their workers, and the connivance of employers with state services (i.e., Department for Foreigners) to exploit and manipulate workers, psychological and sexual harassment, and other treatment unbefitting of Cypriot society (Foreigners; Support Movement, 2000a; 2000b).

All these have had an effect on education. The mass admission of international children to our schools has been a major reason for the emergence of serious problems: extreme nationalism, racist behaviors, the marginalization of these children, and aggressive behaviors toward them. According to a recent report during the academic year 2003-2004 in Cyprus primary schools attended 3248 (or 5.5% of the student population) international students (Panagi, 2004). Although the amplification of multiculturalism in Cyprus has not yet reached the proportions that are observed in other European countries, it has brought to the full blaze of publicity the role of education and pedagogy for people toward a peaceful symbiosis, collaboration, and mutual acceptance within the boundaries of a multicultural society. Education with its role of shaping people has a major responsibility for the future citizen of Cyprus, one who will be able to respond to the needs of the new era of globalization ostensibly founded on intercultural understanding and symbiosis.

The above state of affairs has prompted the following questions:

- ◆ What is happening in our schools regarding the education of international students, and students who have repatriated back to Cyprus from other countries?
- ◆ How are these students treated by their teachers, given that they are not prepared to fit into the mainstream educational process?
- ◆ What is the role of the Ministry of Education and Culture in this situation?

These three questions constituted our agenda at the beginning of our research project. As the project moved on a new question, the fourth, as we will see in detail later, emerged:

- ◆ Is our educational system a melting pot of every alien civilization and a kettle of cultural assimilation that perpetuates biases, clichés, racist behaviors and cultivates the idea that the different has no place among us?

In the first part of this paper we will attempt to begin answering the first three questions by analyzing the case study of a classroom in a

primary school. Using our answers as a stimulus, we will present suggestions for change and reform to the educational system of Cyprus. We will also present ideas for improving the existing practices, and for more effective involvement in the teaching and learning of international students who seem to be marginalized. First, we will consider briefly the term 'multicultural education,' and then we will analyze concisely the methodological background of our research. After this we will develop two vignettes through which we will investigate the existing situation regarding the education of international students in our schools. Using these vignettes as a stimulus, we will discuss the role of the Ministry of Education and Culture in this state of affairs.

In the second part of the paper, we present two more vignettes and through their analysis we will attempt to give an answer to the fourth question. At the same time, problems and perspectives of multicultural education in Cyprus will be presented. To conclude, we will make some recommendations for the future of multicultural education in Cyprus in order to forge a multicultural education ethos in the country.

While this study refers to a Cypriot context, from which we bring forward our experience and reflect on it, we also point to some patterns of practice that might encourage and assist those in other countries who have similar challenges. It is hoped that our efforts here may assist our international colleagues to reflect on their own ways and contexts with some new points of view.

Before proceeding further, however, it would be perhaps interesting to see how this project came about, how our involvement in Cyprus developed, and in a sense, what gave rise to this opportunity for research in the first place.

The principal investigator of the project (PA) was an elementary school teacher, and then with doctoral studies in inclusive education, moved into academia. As a teacher he had many experiences of the policy and practice of multicultural education in Cyprus.

The second member of the research team (TS) was also a teacher who was doing her Masters in Education under the principal investigator's supervision. She was particularly interested in antiracist education and in the equal-rights movement. Discussing together possibilities for her dissertation, and trying to find a common denominator of their interests (inclusive education, antiracism, equal rights) they decided to focus on multicultural education. At the same time they decided to go for a bigger research project on this issue because in Cyprus there were no studies that investigated multicultural education in-depth.

When the project began they asked the help of the third member of the team (JL) who is specialist in intercultural studies and communica-

tion, and multicultural education. His work has been in the combined topic areas of culture, behavior and intercultural communication, and in globalization and lingua franca, plus multicultural education. He has experience in education from several countries: Cyprus, England, Germany, Croatia and Australia, and as an educational consultant and trainer, has been on many missions to North Africa, the Persian Gulf, Europe, the United States, and the Middle East.

Multicultural Education

The field of multicultural education is vast and intersects, among other fields, with international education, globalization, critical pedagogy, and cultural studies (see Banks, 1976; Giroux, 1991; Nieto, 1992; Sleeter & Grant, 1987). Multicultural education has to do with the relations between people of different nationalities and cultures in educational and associated settings. It appeared in America in the 1960s as a reaction to the movements and requests of different minority groups, and African Americans in particular, for political rights and abolition of discrimination in education and work (Colangelo, Dustin, & Foxley, 1985). Multicultural education rejects the ostensibly nationalist policy of previous decades and promotes, at least in theory, a form of education with a pluralistic orientation (Triandis, 1977). It emphasizes issues related to teachers' in-service education (e.g., Le Roux, 2001; Santos, Anxo, & Nieto, 2000), curriculum development for improving the school attainment of minority children (e.g., Phillion, 2002), and to changes in racist attitudes and biases of children of the ascendant group (Bullivart, 1977; Nieto, 2000; Tomlinson, 1998).

Furthermore, according to Leigh and Ktoridou (2001), children in multicultural settings should have, if at all possible, the opportunity not only to maintain but also develop their home language and culture. At the same time, they argue these children need to be given the opportunity to develop their abilities in the language and culture of the dominant mass society. The children of the dominant society, Leigh and Ktoridou continue, should also be encouraged to develop in a second language and in its cultural context. In this way, they conclude tolerance and understanding may be developed in all students through becoming multicultural—all towards greater freedom from monocultural and monolingual bias and prejudice.

Research Design

Having as a base the first three questions as well as the meaning of

multicultural education, we decided to enter the Cypriot school environment and observe what happens there. Our aim was to study and make sense of the situation that prevails in schools regarding the education of international students. For the first part of this study we develop the case study of a fifth grade (32 children) of a Primary School in Nicosia in which seven international students are included.

For collecting our data we followed the naturalistic paradigm (Angelides, 2001; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Miles, 1990). One of us (TS) became participant observer in the classroom recording her experiences regarding the treatment of international students during teaching. Presenting, then, different incidents and vignettes that she had recorded she interviewed the teacher and some children (see Angelides, Leigh & Gibbs, *in press*).

Miles and Huberman (1994) define vignette as a focused description of a series of events taken to be representative, typical, or emblematic in the case you are doing. It has a narrative storylike structure, they continue, that preserves chronological flow and that normally is limited to a brief time span, to one or a few key actors, to a bounded space, or to all three. Vignette, according to Erickson (1987), is based on fieldnotes taken as the events happened and then written up shortly thereafter. The vignette is a more elaborated piece of literature, a more polished version of the account found in the fieldnotes. Vignettes, therefore, are vivid accounts of practice synthesized by the 'outsider' observer, who can interview soon (after the vignette is composed) those who are involved in it, in order to get their views on the account described. In this way, the observer can add further details or the opinions of the practitioners or pupils involved in the described event.

During her participant observation TS collected and analysed eleven vignettes. With this comprehensive data we developed the case study of the class. Parts of the case are presented in the sections that follow. In this way, we present two vignettes and by analyzing them attempt to describe the situation of multicultural education of that school and how international students are treated. The reason behind the selection of these two vignettes, out of eleven, is that they can present to the reader a clear picture of our interpretative purpose that is to investigate what happens today in Cyprus regarding the education of international and repatriated students. Furthermore, we will use this as a basis to comment on the situation of multicultural education in the wider educational system of Cyprus, giving emphasis to the role of the Ministry of Education and Culture (MEC) in particular. At this point our fourth question arose.

When the new question emerged we were running a research

program that aimed to study children who for various reasons are marginalized in schools. We realized that the two issues were related so we decided to attempt to answer the fourth question through the research program we were already running.

We hypothesized that children considered to have 'special needs,' or international children, might meet situations of marginalization. For this reason, TS became a participant observer in a 6th grade with 20 children in a primary school in Nicosia, the capital of Cyprus. She was observing and recording her experiences during lessons and also during breaks (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In particular, during the first stage of this research, she observed every child (20) and recorded with whom he/she is associated during the school day. After two weeks of observation she interviewed all the children in the class, asking to say three positive and three negative 'things' about their school experience (see Pollard, 1996; Armstrong, 1995; Cooper, 1993; Hopkins, 1993). In other words, they were asked to refer to something they like in their school and something they do not like. This was the cause for further discussion to highlight any patterns of marginalization. Then children were asked to identify three of their classmates with whom they wanted to collaborate and provide their reasons for selecting each one. Concurrently, TS based on critical incidents (Angelides, 2001) observed in the classroom, also interviewed, in an unstructured format, the teacher of the class.

The critical incident analysis is a technique by which certain outsiders (e.g., inspectors or academics) collect, analyze and interpret critical incidents that have occurred in a classroom, and then, in collaboration with teachers from a school, explore how that interpretation could inform improvement efforts. Critical incidents are not necessarily (as the term might imply) sensational events involving noticeable tension. Rather they can be relatively minor incidents, everyday events that happen in every school and every classroom. Their criticality is based on the justification, the significance and the meaning given to them by the outsider. Once a critical incident is noted, the outsider immediately proceeds with its analysis by interviewing the teacher and the child or children involved. For this process, no specific interview structure is needed just knowledge about the event that has occurred. Having interviewed those involved in the critical incident, the outsider puts together a composite picture, using the different perceptions of the different stakeholders. In this way we deliberately set out to consider the various explanations and interpretations of the actions of teachers in order to gain a better understanding of their taken-for-granted assumptions. As a result, we can go *behind* teachers' actions in order to explore factors related to the life of the school that might have shaped their

practice and driven their responses. This technique could be useful to researchers and those within schools who are interested in identifying the details of practice, since it offers an efficient means of probing into the deeper working assumptions of stakeholders.

For analyzing our data we followed the two suggested stages of Erickson (1987): inductive and deductive. When we organized our data we read them three times in order to understand the phenomenon and the social context we were studying. We then formulated certain assertions which stated relations and observations from the studied data. Analyzing our data it appeared that some children met situations of marginalization. One of those children was Drosostalida, the girl from Iran who became the focus of our interest in the next phase of research. Although Drosostalida did not seem to be marginalized from her classmates (like some other children whom we consider in another article, see Angelides, Charalambous & Vrasidas, 2004), she appeared, however, to be marginalized from the educational system and its policy about multicultural education. Drosostalida was selected because she was an international student (there were other children who were marginalized but they were not international students), met the purposes of the study and she was interested to participate in our study. There was a follow-on participant observation by TS again and her focus of attention was now on Drosostalida. During this time she held a series of interviews with Drosostalida and she also interviewed her father. Following the first two vignettes, we then present two other vignettes and by analyzing them attempt to answer the fourth question, presenting at the same time problems and perspectives of multicultural education in Cyprus.

Before proceeding further, we would like to make some comments on our data analysis that emerges from our particular focus and approach. Alan Peshkin (1988, 2000) has written extensively about the use of subjectivity audits as a method that encourages researchers to share openly their relevant value systems and even to monitor these in the development of any particular study leading to its soundly based conclusions. He also embraces subjectivity as a pathway into a deeper understanding the human dimension in the world in general, and also as a route to understand whatever specific phenomena or context one may be examining in a particular research venture (Patton, 2003).

In this sense we are going to undertake an open form of writing about the values, biases and political locations we held before undertaking this study, and the ways in which the data results may have been colored by any presuppositions we already held.

Two of us (PA & TS) were teachers who worked in the Cyprus educational system. While working in the system, we many times

disagreed with the way the Ministry of Education dealt with different educational issues. PA made his disagreements public by publishing articles in Cypriot newspapers. Furthermore, the two of us presented, on different occasions, papers at local conferences that were critical of the educational system in Cyprus. These experiences might have influenced us to be more critical in analyzing and interpreting our data, which may be viewed as more negative toward the Ministry of Education.

In addition, as school teachers, the two of us had passed through in-service education programs of the Ministry of Education. Through this process we experienced the problems of staff development in Cyprus and how its curriculum was related (or in this case unrelated) to multicultural education. Once again, these experiences could have oriented us towards a certain angle-of-view which might have skewed our interpretation of the data.

Vignette 1: 'A Boy Sitting at the Teacher's Desk'

It was my (TS) first visit to the class. A boy was sitting at the teacher's desk and was looking at me with an expressionless, strange glance. He was Costis, a boy from Georgia with Russian parents. When our looks met he smiled... The mathematical equation on the board did not seem to interest him particularly. When Mrs Antigone (the teacher) approached him he came back to reality, turned his head to his exercise book and began working. She sat next to him and they tried to solve together the equation. He looked satisfied. The rest of the children worked in groups trying to solve the problem. When the teacher drew away from him towards the center of the classroom Costis began 'pulling' grimaces at the children of the closest group. Mrs Antigone began solving the equation on the board with the help of children. Costis copied it in his exercise book with rash movements and the teacher announced a science test for the following Tuesday. As a result of the test announcement, Costis played lazy with his head on the desk and crossed his hands over his neck.

When the bell rang Costis jumped up and rushed to the playground. When the children left the classroom Mrs Antigone turned her look to me and I went up to her. Before having the chance to say anything she told me: 'Have you seen Costis? I keep him at my desk. I know that it limits his socialization with the rest of the children but I have not got any other choices. He is lost in the groups and at the same time he stirs up the other children. The case of Costis is a double-edged knife...'

Perhaps her problem-solving behavior with Costis did not represent her educational beliefs and this becomes clearer with her subsequent comments. Through her words, her despair can be identified. It is also obvious that she attempts to defend herself. Her pedagogical beliefs did not support the established behavior that weak or disturbing students sit at the teacher's desk. And so she seemed to be troubled with this issue:

Come to see his exercise books. He is weak in Greek language. Look at his history exercise book. Read this answer to see that there is no meaning. Language is related to all subjects. When a student doesn't speak the language well how is he going to understand the mathematical problem; how is he going to understand the history question and how is he going to write an essay? Language is inextricably and interactively related to all subject matters. And unfortunately Costis is very weak. His knowledge is about the knowledge of a second grader!

Mrs. Antigone seemed to be willing to say much more about this issue. It seemed that Costis' problem was really bothering her and she wanted to speak about it. Perhaps TS was *deus ex machina*. Not, of course, to help her but to listen to her! Why though? What is the real situation? Does she have any support from her superiors (head or inspectors)? When asked about the policy of the MEC, Mrs. Antigone's answer was very disappointing:

Unfortunately, officially there are only appointed special teachers who do not take over students who speak a foreign language. Thus, the whole burden is on the regular teacher who following his or her own initiatives has to find ways of helping these children. The curriculum is very heavy and there are too many children in the class. And if you make a change, you're at risk to be blamed by your superiors that you did not cover the curriculum you should. Unfortunately there is no help from anybody.

Through these comments of Mrs. Antigone and also through our experiences it seems that the MEC does not pay enough attention to the international students' education. It seems that public schools in Cyprus, like schools in mainland Greece, according to the literature (e.g., Katsikas & Politou, 1999), continue to function monoculturally and monolingually although the student population is not any longer culturally homogeneous. The educational policy for repatriates and foreigners considers the different previous education of these 'other' students as a deficiency, or a disadvantage that has to be overcome quickly, so these students can be assimilated with the local students (Katsikas & Politou, 1999).

In addition, the MEC does not seem to be giving the necessary emphasis on in-service education of teachers to enable them to develop

a multicultural approach to their teaching. Modgil, Verma, Mallick and Modgil (1997) claim that teachers are very often accused to be racists, nationalists and not positively oriented toward a culturally pluralistic society. However, the authors continue, teachers have less responsibility than the teachers' educators who are responsible for their in-service education. In Cyprus in-service education is still lethargic regarding multiculturalism. Perhaps the international trends and methods in multicultural education do not yet motivate the MEC and the Pedagogical Institute, which are responsible for teachers' in-service education. Our education contains many nationalistic elements (Frangoudaki & Dragona, 1997), not only regarding teachers' education but also in the curriculum and in the books that are used in our schools (Millas, 1991; Mina, 2000; Hodge & Louis, 1966).

The state, therefore, needs to do much in order to improve the situation. The idea of multiculturalism seems to be virtually nonexistent within the Ministry of Education and Culture. For achieving change, not only teachers themselves have to be convinced of the value and the significance or the need for preparing teachers for a career in a multicultural society, but also the state, as the center of authority that determines the educational policy (with the curriculum and the textbooks), must believe in this and be actively involved with competence (Kelly & Angelides, 2001). We read, for example, in the curriculum of primary schools (Ministry of Education and Culture, 1996):

The curriculum respects the uniqueness of every child and responds to any inborn or acquired individual differences, the early intervention of which constitute a need for appropriate planning, right implementation and full exploitation of the time provided... (p. 21)

Through our personal experiences and also through the analysis of Vignette 1, it seems that, other than the ad hoc on-the-spot efforts of Mrs. Antigone as an individual, there was no official or unofficial planning to improve the situation despite its seriousness. Costis was very weak in the Greek language and only his teacher, from her own knowledge and initiative, tried to help him.

Vignette 2: 'Viki and Apostolos Are Fully Integrated'

The essay had the title: 'Letter to the Secretary General of the United Nations'. Viki and Apostolos (both children were repatriates from the former Soviet Union) began in almost the same way: 'I am a little Cypriot and I wanted to tell you about the problem of my country...' Discussing with Mrs Antigone the fact that both

children called themselves Cypriots she said: 'Viki and Apostolos are fully integrated.'

What does the term 'fully integrated' mean for the teacher? Is it likely, then, that 'integrated' means fully assimilated? Further, is it likely that Mrs Antigone, who carries modern ideas, seeks unconsciously homogeneity in the micro society of her class in order to avoid the difficulties of multicultural education, and at the same time to handle her difficult educational tasks? Is it likely that she, like many of us, find a snug berth with our ignorance of individual differences? Is it likely to feel in this way safer, moulding everybody to fit within our cultural boundaries?

Looking at the philosophy and orientation of the primary education curriculum (Ministry of Education and Culture, 1996), we read:

The general aims of education are defined by the state on the basis of our national, religious and cultural tradition, the socioeconomic situation, and the international educational, technological and cultural achievements (p. 17).

Multiculturalism is noted nowhere. May be it is remotely implicit in the phrase 'socioeconomic situation.' For sure our national, religious and cultural tradition should constitute the basis of our education. However, education should not ignore that our society is already multicultural and therefore it should reflect a positive perception of the different cultures and races that now constitute it. There is, of course, the perception (Bullivant, 1981) that by teaching all children the cultural differences in societies, it is possible to reinforce, instead of reducing, the feeling of being different. However, it is an unchallengeable right for every child to learn about its cultural heritage, language, history, mores and other aspects of his/her way of life; because everyone has the right to be different, at least to a socially agreeable reasonable extent.

Within modern societies the knowledge of difference should be a contribution to social improvement. The differences in descent, language, physical situation and socio-economic status should constitute elements for enrichment and not isolation! Different people, from different cultures, should be able to collaborate, and in an equal relationship, to offer those things that others do not have (Batelaan & Gundare, 2000). Indeed, different cultures, as Leigh and Ktoridou (2001) argue, may be better at doing some things than others, but every culture has activities that it excels in.

For this reason the policy makers should develop a multicultural orientation of the curriculum giving the chance to every teacher to build on the experiences of all children. It would be, of course, an omission not to note that one of the general aims of the philosophy of primary

education in Cyprus is the European orientation and our integration as a full member of the European Union (see Jones & Street-Porter, 1997). Mrs Antigone made a poignant point when she said: 'The policy of every government and at the same time of our educational system aims at homogeneity. This is the bitter truth. Whatever is different, is also dangerous for keeping the regularity!'

Confronting therefore the educational situation, the school, it seems is inflexible, inertia-filled and monolithic. The only exception emerges in the teacher's sensitivity, and personal initiative to resist the role of stigmatizing those 'foreign-body' children who are in a subordinate position and who are compelled to compete, in their school life, with the other mainstream children (more favored classmates) in an at least potentially hostile environment. According to Katsikas and Politou (1999) the rhetoric for equal opportunities in the school system functions like the Procrustean bed. All the children are laid out on the bed and whoever is lucky may be snatched from the 'jaws of death.' However, 'death' discriminates. Some students who have a greater portion of 'school mortality' do not escape. They don't have the authorized or 'received' social and ethnic characteristics. The point is that the children who are different, to the mainstream, fail, and so do not escape the system discriminating against them.

Reaching this stage of our analysis the new (fourth) question arose: 'Is our educational system a melting pot of every alien civilization and a kettle of cultural assimilation that perpetuates biases, clichés, racists behaviors and cultivates the idea that the different has no place among us?' As we have said earlier when this question emerged a new methodology was developed to seek an answer. In the following part we first present briefly the girl that we focused our research on and then we will attempt to answer this question through the analysis of two vignettes.

The case of Drosostalida, a Girl from Iran

Anna or Drosostalida, as we call her in this paper, is an international student and studies in the 6th grade of a primary school. She is a quite cheerful girl but slightly reserved. She is thin with dark skin and with small black oriental eyes that look at you as if looking for the truth in your words and movements. Innocent suspicion can be distinguished in her glance. Many times her glance nailed us and puzzled us at the same time: 'Did we say anything wrong?' Her voice was smooth and her use of Greek language was very good. She is a successful student and a very good athlete. Through dialogue with her, we believe that TS won the trust of Drosostalida and in so doing she managed to touch on some sensitive matters such as if she liked the lesson on religion.

Mr. Paris is the father of Drosostalida. He came to Cyprus around eight years ago. He is a thin man, relatively short with thinning hair and black eyes. With quite dark skin and a wide laugh, very gentle, warm-hearted and willing to talk. Despite the fact he can understand Greek very well, he is accustomed to speak in English. It seems that he loves his children very much and does whatever he can to provide them a comfortable life. He is quite anxious about their future since in a year's time their stay in Cyprus is over. He thinks in particular about Drosostalida: 'Drosostalida likes Cyprus. She feels like she is a Cypriot and does not want to leave. One day she told me that she will never again wear the head scarf that women wear in Iran ... We'll see...'

Vignette 3: 'My Name Is Anna, My Other Name Is Shabnam'

She seemed quite confused when I (TS) asked her which is her real name. She answered in a very silent voice:

'Shabnam ... that means in Greek dewdrop (Drosostalida)', she rushed to complete.

'Your name is very nice...' I said without daring to ask why she changed her name. I got the answer later from her father who was so honest. He answered naturally:

'For not being different from the other children. All members of our family changed their names!'

And continued saying that Drosostalida told him from the very beginning when he goes to school not to call her with her real name and not to speak to her in Persian. Thus, whenever Mr. Paris goes to school to pick her up he just calls with her preferred Greek name: 'Anna, come!'

Drosostalida seems to meet a very deep alienation. It seems that she feels she is in limbo between two worlds. The situation of Drosostalida can be compared with the black child in England as it is described by Parekh (1997):

[The child's] color and its preferences tie it up with its people. [The child's] birth and fortune, its past and its future, point to completely different and conflicting directions. [The child's] present is nothing more than an arena of struggle between the now and the future, without any assurance which one will win at the end. [The child] feels caught between two worlds and wishes to leave the one, but it cannot, nor would it let go; [the child] wishes to embrace the other world, but is afraid that it can not do so and the other world will not accept it anyway. (p. 55)

Growing up on the monocultural educational diet of Cypriot schools,

little Drosostalida seems to feel that the eyes of the rest of the children look at her through a prism of stereotypes they acquired from their education. In this way she chooses—and with her, her whole family chooses likewise—to move towards conformity and full assimilation because this will ‘save’ her from contempt and pity.

Throughout the analysis of our data it appears that ‘our’ children of the dominant Cypriot culture are trapped in the monocultural ‘democratic philosophy’ of our education and are not encouraged to study other cultures and societies and so cannot develop any respect for them. (That is democratic for those who are, or become, like us in the dominant cultural milieu). It seems that these mainstream Cypriot children are imprisoned in the frames of their own culture and have difficulties to appreciate the differences. In contrast, they may feel threatened by diversity and difference and they do not know how to deal with it.

This monocultural conformity should not be surprising as these children have naturally internalized their culture, its behavior and surroundings (including its bias and prejudice), to be their own. These children have, like all other children, inherited their culture, and this makes them what they become mentally and behaviorally. Culture therefore, is not just *out there* (that is external to the person), but makes fundamental changes to what the person is inside, at the mental and emotional levels. Thus each individual exists in a culture, and also has that same culture internalized within. *The culture is both out there and in here*, (that is both out there and inside me mentally and emotionally). *I am my culture* we could say (Leigh, 2000).

Drosostalida seems to feel this alienation and pressure to conform intensely, and attempts, in every way, to be assimilated with our children through this conformity. However, inside she is not of that culture, and hence is conflicted, as her behavior (pursuing Cypriot Greek Christian culture) and mental state (at least partly Iranian and Islamic) are not in synch. This intense effort of the girl to be absorbed by the dominant culture can be detected in the following example:

We eat in a Christian way! Drosostalida answered sharply when I (TS) asked her what she wanted to eat for lunch. Then smiling I dared to ask for clarification ... Drosostalida just wanted to tell me that ‘they eat everything’ [they eat pork as well now, even though forbidden in Islam], exactly like us ... the Christians! Her father, who was present that noon, stated with a lot of meaning that his daughter is Cypriot! I believe he was sure that his statement would please particularly Drosostalida!

Analyzing the above incident we reached the conclusion that Drosostalida appears to see herself through the eyes of the others. She herself attempts to reject her identity. She feels intensively the fear that

her friends may learn her real name, they may hear her father talking to her in Persian. She tries in any opportunity to emphasize that she has no difference from 'us.' 'We eat in a Christian way!' And all these happen perhaps because every day she becomes a victim (the same happens to her entire family) of racist behaviors that unfortunately linger on in our schools.

Like little Drosostalida there are many other children in Cyprus that may, without being able to turn away, meet negative perceptions, attitudes and behaviors from the maze of 'local' children. Despite the fact that Drosostalida appeared to have many friends at the school with whom she was mixing harmoniously and although she stated many times that she was very happy with her friends, it seems that she does not feel confidence and trust. She appears to have suspicion for everybody. And her only defence was the denial of herself.

Vignette 4: 'The Custom of the Fishbowl with Golden Fish'

She loved very much the lesson of religion and she told me (TS) that she wanted to go with her friends to the Sunday school. Her face took a sad expression when she carried on to tell me that it is not permitted for her to go to Sunday school because she is Muslim and Sunday school is for Christian Orthodox only! I tried to change the theme of our conversation ... I felt that the climate was getting tense so I asked her about the customs of Iran. She replied with a happy mood and described an Iranian custom. In this celebration they sit at the table and put in the middle of it a fishbowl with gold fish. I asked with great interest if this custom symbolizes anything and then she answered a little bit confused, like she returned back to reality, that she did not know... She does not know very well the customs of Iran. I continued asking her if her teachers have asked her any time to refer to Iranian manners, customs, songs or whatever. Her answer was negative. Without saying anything she indicated with her head a silent: No!

Perhaps through the lesson of religion, Drosostalida found what she really needed. According to Tsiakalos (2000), the Christian belief, that consists the core of religion lessons in Greece and Cyprus, gives many stimuli and explicit directions for our relations with people from other groups, as well as with people who come to our country as immigrants and refugees. One of the most important commandments in the New Testament is Jesus' message of love: 'Love thy neighbor as yourself.' A foreigner in Israel, the Good Samaritan, incarnates for Jesus the

message of love. In these religious classes it is taught that Jesus identifies himself with all people who are in a situation of need, he calls them 'brothers' and considers that whatever is offered to them it is like being offered to him. Moreover, the New Testament shows, according to Tsiakalos, that all people are creatures of God and they enjoy at the same degree human dignity and the right to live (ibid.). All the above seems to touch the sensitive yet hopeful Drosostalida who desperately asks to put into action the messages of Christ. Nevertheless, there is still a big and torturous question. Why is Drosostalida afraid to talk about her own religion and her manners and customs? Why is she trying in every way to hide her identity? Why is she trying in every possible way to melt into the melting pot? Why doesn't she want to be different? Why does she want to follow and be a part of the dominant culture? Within the analytic reference to the general aims regarding the philosophy and orientations of the curriculum for students' socialization (Ministry of Education and Culture, 1996) we read that it works for students to be helped

... as much as possible for deeper understanding and appreciation of people of their ethnic group but also of other people who belong to different ethnic, religious, social and cultural groups, with the aim of communication and collaboration. (p. 19)

We absolutely agree with the above formulation of the particular aim but unfortunately it seems that in practice it is not implemented. As it appeared in the above vignettes, Drosostalida never had the chance to refer to her own religion, to the manners and customs of her country and to the habits of Iranian people. In contrast, if we take the example of religious lessons as they are taught in Cypriot schools, Christianity is presented as the only true religion without reference to other religions, and if any reference is made, other religions are presented as 'primitive', 'superficial' and of 'lower quality.'

This situation is much more intense in the case of Drosostalida. It seems that in the schools of Cyprus and in school practice there is not enough effort for acceptance of other cultures, other religions and other societies in general. This situation results in the 'imprisonment' of our children in the frames of our own and only culture, limiting their ability to understand, appreciate and respect difference. We believe that these children reach a point where they are afraid of difference because they do not have the chance to learn about the diversity of life, and as a result ultimately they feel that they are threatened by difference! A vivid example that exemplifies the view that the MEC is acting spasmodically to multicultural matters, is the statement of a senior officer of the Ministry, that in a school he knew, they found 'Kapetan Michalis' (Captain

Michael, a novel by Nicos Kazantzakis) in Russian, and it was given to a student whose mother tongue was Russian. This event emphasizes the general inertia that predominates the MEC in multicultural matters, and that only in isolated cases, many times by accident, something of a multicultural nature may be offered.

Running parallel with the fact that our children feel threatened by the difference in our schools is the undercurrent of racism. Starting from the fact that our students know very little about other societies and cultures they can respond to them only with terms of superficial generalizations and stereotypes. Thus, our children that are not familiar with the sensitive appreciation of other cultures have no other choice but to judge them with their own ethnocentric, or even xenophobic, rules and regulations. The more international children are similar to these ethnocentric regulations, the more civilized they are considered to be. And the converse hold true too (Triandis, 1997).

It seems that Drosostalida, within this educational monocultural climate feels strongly that nobody is interested about her own religion, culture, customs and manners. She feels that to be acceptable, to be considered as 'civilized,' she has to turn her back and ignore who she is, and has to fully conform with the expectations of children from the local majority. In other words, she has to enter the pot of cultural assimilation, to melt and to become at-one with the children of the dominant culture.

Attempting an Answer to the Fourth Question

Throughout the above analysis it seems that the MEC of Cyprus does not pay enough attention to the education of different children. It seems that Cypriot schools, like Greek ones according to the literature (e.g., Katsikas & Politou, 1999), continue to function monoculturally and monolingually, although the population of students in many areas is not any longer culturally homogeneous. The educational policy (at least as practiced) for expatriates and foreigners, considers the difference in background and education of 'other' students as a sort of deficiency that has to be covered up quickly so these children can hopefully be assimilated as soon as possible (ibid).

Furthermore, the MEC does not seem to pay the necessary attention to teachers' in-service education in order to become able to teach following multicultural approaches. The aim of many teachers, perhaps unconsciously or under the implicit pressure of the educational system, is the 'full assimilation' of 'different' children into the dominant culture (Angelides & Stylianou, 2001). In Cyprus in-service education is still lethargic regarding multiculturalism. Perhaps the international trends

and methods in multicultural education do not yet motivate the Ministry of Education and the Pedagogical Institute, which are responsible for teachers' in-service education.

Reaching this stage of the argument, therefore, we can go back to the fourth question and attempt to give some answers. Throughout the analysis of our data as well as through the above discussion with a great degree of certainty we can say that, yes, our educational system very often, if not always, functions like a melting pot of every alien culture. The way of our schools including textbooks, teachers and curriculum seems to function as a kettle of cultural assimilation where the different appears as not having a position among us. If our education consists of the cornucopia of the 'ideological mechanisms of the state' (and of whichever societal groups that govern it), based on the analysis of our data, it seems that the 'chef' stirring the kettle is the MEC acting to fulfill the orders placed by the state.

Although the government through the rhetoric of its senior officers does not accept the above arguments it seems that very little is done by its side for improving the situation (Angelides & Zembylas, 2002). It has to become aware that the consequences of monocultural education followed by its schools damages and impoverishes *all* children. The educational system in Cyprus cannot ignore the international educational developments and the particular conditions within which it functions. The population of Cyprus is not any longer homogeneous. Societies and minorities have arisen and participate actively in the country's life. Therefore, this multicultural formation of the contemporary Cyprus society forebodes dangers if pedagogy that is offered by our schools suffers a monocultural diet. From this point, differentiations and ghettos begin, societal stereotypes, discriminations, tensions and racist behaviors are created, as we are all herded down a one-way dead-end.

Vision for the Future

Presently we see many countries of both sides of the Atlantic, including Greece, adopt measures for change in education aiming to move from the ethnocentric character of education to a pluralistic character within the framework of adopting the multicultural perspective in education. Within this framework, new experimental programs are developed (e.g., Filoxenia program), teaching innovations and pedagogical practice. These programs are implemented for fighting off racism, xenophobia and other social discriminations for the creation of a positive pedagogical climate that would promote human rights. Some of the goals of these programs are the following: (a) The promotion and expansion of

knowledge and skills of teachers regarding management and resolution of multicultural issues that emerge within the school workplace. (b) The development of a teaching methodology for implementing intercultural and antiracist education. (c) Teachers and students to become aware of the range and the diversity of problems related to racism, xenophobia and intercultural education as well as to change their attitude and behaviors. (d) The encouragement of collaboration and communication among students cultivating creativity and team spirit.

The meaning of education and pedagogy, therefore, is determinative for the formation of the contemporary citizen. This meaning that lies in the art of pedagogy does not aim to put in the soul of individuals the power to see because they have this power, but to correct the power of sight's direction because it is not focusing in the direction it should. The formation then of social individuals, able to understand and interpret diversity and the infinite dimensions that any culture produces, is the central and global goal of education. The basic axes of this education as they are defined by Kanakidou and Papayianni (1994) are the following: First, the formation of positive notions for the differences between cultures; second, cultivation of solidarity among people; third, respect of other cultures as equal to ours; and fourth, education for a culture of peace. These axes should form the bases for communication and relationships among people. The relations between people and their natural and social environment should also be integral to this formation.

Generally, multicultural education is not considered an evolution of assimilation methods to absorb citizens or groups of a country, nor a method of engraving cultural boundaries and conservation of particularities of differentiation and categorization of the members of a multicultural society. Multicultural education means introduction of critical thinking, solidarity, interaction, interchange and pluralism in educational practice. The result is 'learning for integration into social relations where payment surpasses cost for both sides of the relation' (Triandis, 1997, p. 161). Moreover, multicultural education means attributing to culture its whole meaning, which suggests culture be understood powerfully as a group that includes ways of life, symbols, values and all those elements that people use as points of reference in their real relationships.

Trying to envision the future we will agree with the proposition of Triandis (1997) who supports 'prosthetic multiculturalism' where people learn to be effective and to respect others who are different in culture. Prosthetic multiculturalism, Triandis continues, is from its nature something that needs to be developed in the majority rather than in the minority of population, and over a period of many years we should develop a pluralism that will give self-esteem to all and appreciation of cultural

differences. It is the time, therefore, that the educational system of Cyprus envision the future and respond accordingly.

The Cypriot educational system cannot ignore the international developments and the particular condition in which these developments function (see Sleeter, 1992; Nieto, 1992). The population of Cyprus is now in reality heterogeneous. This multicultural character of the modern Cyprus society poses dangers if our education continues its monocultural offerings. The children of foreigners and repatriates must stop being the 'foreign body' of our schools. This situation necessitates solutions to these problems. That is, having a multicultural perspective in a multicultural society that is based on abolishing any discrimination, and promoting equality and mutual acceptance. Our educational system needs deep changes to respond to the contemporary realities and to forge a multicultural education ethos in our educational system. We need to redefine and reposition the aims and purposes of our education, having in mind the multicultural synthesis of our society, in such a way that equal opportunities for learning will be given to all children.

Moving towards multicultural instruction many requirements arise. Multicultural teaching must be based on the principle of the equilibrium of differences and similarities between cultures, and on the principle of systematic opposition to discrimination. How easy is it for teachers, then, to adopt and implement multicultural education in their classes? Teachers, like all people, carry some values, beliefs and ideologies that shape their attitudes, positive or negative, towards the 'different.' It is therefore difficult to eliminate or change such ideas and attitudes especially if the teachers have grown up in a 'closed' ethnocentric and nationalistic environment without any contact and involvement with other cultures. Here, therefore, emerges the significance of teachers' education that can lead them to acquire knowledge, sensitivities and solution-oriented strategies (Sleeter, 2001). This education is on the basis that any differences between the different cultural groups can be bridged and all together integrated or meshed into a multicultural society (Reese, 2001).

Education can be a strong weapon in the hands of those who are responsible to 'manage' it because it gives them the power to shape consciousness, consciences and political perceptions. The educational system of Cyprus has the power to play a catalytic role in consolidating the concept of the 'global citizen,' beyond origin, colour or race, and in fighting off social exclusion, nationalism, sexism, and racism. It is then necessary that any new measures and changes in education aim towards reinforcing the pluralistic character of education within the framework of adopting a multicultural perspective in education (Triandis, 1997). It is our duty as educationalists to catch the new shape of contemporary

society that is internationally extant. No school can ignore this and effectively educate its students.

Inclusive Education: The Right To Be Different

Trying to make our suggestions more concrete, not only to the system (that seems to be hard-of-hearing), but also to teachers, like Mrs. Antigone, who ask desperately for support, we suggest as a *first step*, to move towards inclusive education. Within the last few years the international literature (e.g., Ainscow, 1999; UNESCO, 1994) pays attention to the right of children to be different and emphasizes education that includes *all* children in teaching. Basic requirement for implementing intercultural education is to have the roots of the entire educational system based on the principle of equality. Schools should equally accept all children, to respect differences, to support learning and to respond to the individual needs of every child. Inclusion is based on the principle that accepts and respects the heterogeneous character of the groups of students. To enliven this principle, proper methods of teaching, appropriately modified curriculum, and adequate resources are organized in such a way to support individual differences.

In this way the 'foreign' children should be considered to offer useful information for critical evaluation of the classroom activities, instead of promoting the perception that they have problems that must be weathered or even eradicated. These children must be considered as indicators that will help us find out how classroom activities can be improved in a positive way for all children. These children are the 'hidden voices' and passive arbitrators between the educational institutions and their curriculum that our schools must listen to and take into consideration, to respond accordingly (Ainscow, Booth, & Dyson, 1998). The presence of children that do not fit with the existing 'menu' of the school gives us incentives to search for alternative ways of organizing our lessons in order to provide equal opportunities for participation and learning for all children. In this way we can build a different culture in our schools, we can build an inclusive culture where we can be different but equal.

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